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Cubans in Puerto Rico

By NORMAN GALL

San Juan, 80 exile leaders from New York,

In a downtown store here where coin-operated pinball and vending machines are distributed some twenty excited Cuban exiles gathered Tuesday night to discuss Monday's attack on two freighters in a Cuban harbor 200 miles east of Havana.

The men were nervous and anxious for news. Many of them were prosperous-looking business and professional men wearing finely tailored tropical suits and expensive horn-rimmed glasses. They represented a successful adjustment to a life in exile.

These were among the 1,500 Cuban exiles here who over the past three months have contributed \$20,000 to finance activities of "Operation Alpha 66" an anti-Castro raiding organization which has promised contributors "at least five concrete acts of sabotage this year."

Rising international tension over Cuba this month and renewal of exile raids on its harbors comes at a time when anti-Castro forces abroad are desperately seeking realignments to end bickering and jealousies which have blocked unified exile activity both before and since the abortive April, 1961, Bay of Pigs invasion.

Observers here fear that groups like Alpha 66, avowedly a nonpolitical raiding and sabotage unit headed by former leaders of the anti-Castro underground in Cuba, may provoke or worsen an already grave international crisis if allowed to proceed outside United States strategic control.

Highly placed exiles here believe sensational isolated raids are no substitute for long-range strategy for Castro's overthrow. Among them is Manolo Ray, former Public Works Minister in the first Castro Government, who bluntly charges that the United States CIA refuses to support a rebuilding of the anti-Castro underground because it later could become a political organization beyond United States control.

A short curly-haired engineer now a consultant with a Puerto Rico planning board designing low-cost housing, Ray will meet in Ponce this weekend with

Miami, Caracas and Puerto Rico to form a new alliance of left-of-center democratic elements, called Junta Revolucionaria Cubana.

The doctors, lawyers, accountants, bankers and business men assembled Tuesday night at the coin-machine business headquarters of Jeronimo Esteve, Jr., seemed uncertain of what to do next. Esteve is the tall amiable chairman of a committee coordinating fund-raising and propaganda activities of nineteen exile political, professional and religious groups in Puerto Rico. Wealthy Cubans contribute to anti-Castro causes indorsed by this committee.

With some 15,000 Cubans in residence and because of proximity to Cuba, Puerto Rico has risen sharply in recent months in importance as a scene of anti-Castro activity. Due to high demand for skilled professionals and the lack of a language barrier, the local exile colony is prospering in comparison with 150,000 Cubans whom Miami's shaky economy must somehow support.

Coming here often during the past three months to raise money for Alpha 66 was Antonio Veciana, former president of the Cuban Accountants Association and briefly chief of underground sabotage activities in Cuba until he departed for Miami in late 1961.

Veciana, former leader of the now defunct Popular Revolutionary movement, arrived here Tuesday to appear on Puerto Rican television, bitterly criticizing the NATO nations for renting ships to Communist countries for shipment of strategic goods to Cuba.

Puerto Rico promises to be an important outpost in the campaign to depose Fidel Castro, as it was in the exile efforts to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship which finally succeeded last year. But if homeless Cubans fish alone in troubled waters, they may do so at greater danger to the Western world than would be justified by what small military and psychological benefits they could hope to achieve.